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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

THE CONSUMERS' LABEL.

MR. STARR HOYT NICHOLS, in his article, "Another View of the Union Label,"* strikes a note which must appeal with force to those consumers who desire to aid in every effort which would tend to up-lift wage-earners, but who have not felt justified in endorsing the "Union Label"; for, unintentionally, he suggests how the advantages of the label may be secured without its disadvantages.

While it is true that "to support producers in fine style has never been the professed purpose of buyers," still there is a large contingent of the buying public that desire to buy only goods which have been made under wholesome conditions, and have been fairly paid for.

It is a fact that the mass of shoppers are selfish, are thoughtless, are eager only to obtain the greatest bargains at the least cost to themselves; yet there are many who recognize the fact that the lowest-priced goods are not always the cheapest in the end, and that disease or death is the real cost in many instances, not only to producers but to purchasers as well.

There are many conscientious, thoughtful people who would prefer to buy goods that bore some distinguishing mark as a guarantee that they were made under sanitary conditions, and that they did not represent the "sweated" toil of hard-pressed workers, who had been forced to accept starvation wages.

Among these conscientious buyers would naturally be classed the large number of shoppers who have joined The Consumers' League. This League was organized some seven years ago for the purpose of "ameliorating the condition of women and children in mercantile establishments." After the passage of the mercantile law its scope of work was extended and one of its present purposes is to endeavor to form a public opinion which will lead consumers to recognize their responsibilities for all the conditions under which goods are made as well as sold.†

The advocates of the Union Label claim that their method is the best way to advance the interests of consumers and producers. Mr. Nichols very justly contends, however, that the Union Label primarily stands for increasing the power of Trades Unions, and that, although the workers are required to belong to unions, and must not accept less than the established minimum wage, no test is required of the quality of the work, nor is the label a guarantee that it has been done outside of tenement houses.

* Published in the October number of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

† Similar organizations have been formed in Philadelphia and Brooklyn, and are about to be formed in Boston, Baltimore, and Chicago.

What we need, therefore, is a label which will not arbitrarily exact that the workers should belong to labor organizations, but which would insure to the purchaser : 1st. Sanitary conditions in the production ; 2d. A living wage to the producer ; 3d. Good workmanship ; 4th. The indorsement of the Factory Inspector ; and 5th, the option of its use by all manufacturers who can prove that they fulfil the necessary conditions.

Such a label would be an advantage to the producer, to the buyer, to the merchant, and to the manufacturer. Moreover, this label could rightfully be called the "Consumers' Label" (to distinguish it from the "Union Label"), and, if adopted by the leading merchants of any one city, it would soon force its way into universal use. All merchants would have to adopt it, or lose their custom as soon as the purchasing public understood its nature.

In the commercial rivalry between the great cities of the country, the conditions under which merchandise is manufactured must, of necessity, command more and more attention, and may, indeed, prove a deciding factor in the struggle for business. Massachusetts claims to have no sweat-shop work done within her borders, owing to her stringent laws and the proper enforcement of them. Massachusetts' inspectors also have the authority to examine goods sent for sale from other States. Boston merchants have already shown a disposition to co-operate with consumers by ascertaining under what conditions goods are made. A well-known Philadelphia firm has advertised recently that the underwear sold over its counters was made in farmhouses "under pure, healthful conditions, and not in sweat-shops." This is a sign of the times, a sign that the public is being educated to demand how its garments are manufactured, just as it has been taught to demand how its meat is inspected and slaughtered, and under what conditions its bread is made in the bakeshops.

As a proof that the subject of sweat-shop goods is considered an important problem, and one that concerns the commerce of cities, let me state that a short time ago a letter was received by The Consumers' League from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Vienna, Austria, asking for a report of the League's work, and mentioning that the members had heard of the efforts of the League to induce merchants not to sell goods made in sweat-shops, and that this action against the sweating system was a most interesting one to the members of that body.

If the buyers of the Merchants' Association of New York pursue their policy of getting goods at the lowest prices possible, regardless of conditions of production, disease germs may be spread all over the country.

Mr. John Franey, Assistant State Factory Inspector, testified in 1896, before the Reinhard Committee, that there were between 5,000 and 6,000 sweat-shops in New York, and that it was impossible for the Factory Inspectors to visit all these places as often as they ought to be visited. In one year 4,200 sweat-shops were inspected, and of these about 1,200 were re-inspections. One hundred and sixty sweaters were arrested and fined in this county, and the sum of \$2,400 in fines was paid.

Mr. Franey also stated that there are about 385 wholesale clothing manufacturers, and not more than about 15 make the clothing exclusively in their own shops. When contracts are made between contractors or "sweaters" and the employees or "sweated," no sanitary conditions are mentioned. In one instance, scarlet fever was found to have been in the rooms where clothing was being made. The Factory Inspector notified the Board of Health to fumigate, but had no power to seize the goods and have

them fumigated without delay. Before the Board of Health could attend to the matter, and in spite of precautionary measures being taken, the goods were sent out to the wholesale merchant and could not then be distinguished. I quote verbatim from some further testimony given by Mr. Franey:

Q. Mr. Mayer: As a matter of fact, one of the great dangers of the sweating system is that goods go out of the shops, or dwelling-houses where they are made and where there may be infectious diseases?

A. Mr. Franey: Yes, sir, that is the great danger; that is the danger that the people at large suffer under the system; the dangers of the people employed, I think, are equal in the same direction, in addition to these other abuses which are in the system.

Q. But the general public is under that constant danger, namely, that goods go out of houses, or shops, where there are infectious diseases.

A. Yes, sir; that has hurt the business in the city of New York to some extent.

Q. What business?

A. The clothing business. At one time there was a good deal of alarm created through rumors of diseases, which hurt the manufacturers of clothing, and the business was transferred to other cities. I think it would be profitable for the manufacturers of clothing in this city to advertise that they do not have their goods made in anything but good wholesome buildings.

If the only stipulation be that goods must be procured at low prices, then manufacturers, in their keen competition to undersell their neighbors, will naturally crush down the wages of the workers, and make the present bad conditions even worse.

Of what use is it to "build up commerce" if the standard of living and the welfare of the wage-earners are not to be built up too?

The following is a list of some of the prices paid in New York at the present time for sweat-shop work:

Cambric dresses, waists, lined and trimmed, \$1.20 a dozen; nightgowns, with embroidery and tucked yokes—thread furnished and embroidery cut out by maker—\$1.00 a dozen; silk waists, 98 cents a dozen; women's wrappers, 49 cents a dozen; shirts, 30 cents a dozen; aprons, 22 cents a dozen; neckties, \$1.25 a gross; knee-pants, 59 to 75 cents a dozen; vests, \$1.00 to \$3.00 a dozen; trousers, 12½ cents to 75 cents per pair; coats, 32 cents to \$1.50 each; percentage off for Boss sweaters and deduction for cost of cartage.

These are not "living wages" under present conditions, they are *dying wages*, and the purchaser of such goods is responsible for them. It is a well-established economic fact that purchasers create what they purchase. Their desires create the economic demands. Therefore, when we purchase the product of sweat shops we help to maintain them.

The manager of one of New York's leading stores and two members of Boston firms have stated that they could ascertain a great deal about the conditions under which their goods are manufactured, if their customers showed any desire to obtain such information. Therefore, if buyers are conscientious and persistent, they will insist that merchants give to them a guarantee of the wholesomeness of the goods that they sell, and merchants will then insist that manufacturers provide them with such a guarantee.

Notwithstanding its name, consumers would not be responsible for the proposed label. It would be awarded by the Factory Inspector, and would serve as the crest of noble manufacturers, each of whom would zealously guard it, so that none who did not deserve it could use it.

The State provides factory inspectors who are instructed to look into the sanitary conditions under which goods are made. When inspectors find that goods are made in violation of the provisions of the factory act, they are required to place a tag on such goods, bearing the words "tenement made." These tags can be removed by the local board of health after the garments have been disinfected.

At present the State does not concern itself with the wages of producers, nor does it make any effort to procure good workmanship.

But the problem of "the living wage" will be solved only when work is no longer unskilled. It will be the duty of the State to demand a high standard of workmanship when it provides for the training of the workman.

Where the experiment has been made it has been found that it is a more economical and better policy for the government to provide training schools for manual labor than to support prisons and workhouses.

Dr. H. H. Belfield, in a report to the United States Commission of Labor, stated that officers of manual training schools all over the country testify to the good effects of training upon the character. "It develops judgment, earnestness, readiness, independence, self-respect, enthusiasm, accuracy, steadiness, persistence. The will is disciplined, the mind is broadened and made more logical, with a tendency to original investigation, and habits of industry are formed. Above all, it teaches the nobility of labor and inculcates a love for it."

The State of New Jersey duplicates any sum under \$5,000 per annum which may be given to found or maintain any manual training school.

In advancing the claims of the "Consumers' Label," I believe I have met all the objections summed up by Mr. Nichols against the "Union Label."

Mr Nichols may be right when he says that we must wait many years for a label in which "there would be no profit for any special class, no money for its promoters, no power for its advocates, but only general benevolence and fair play for all." All reforms take time and involve the education of the public and the growth of popular sentiment before they can be realized; but the time will come when consumers will recognize their moral responsibility, and will no more purchase goods without feeling reasonably confident that they have been made under conditions which are beneficial to both the producer and the consumer, than they would now be willing to purchase goods which they know to be stolen.

It is a hopeful sign that institutions which stand for education and progress have evinced a deep interest in the work of The Consumers' League. Colleges, women's clubs, ethical societies and church associations have shown a spirit of sympathy and co-operation.

The public is being aroused from its lethargy, and when it is thoroughly awakened to its responsibilities, buyers will consider it quite as important to ask for wholesome goods as for cheap goods.

The labor organizations have done much for the cause of the workingman. They have raised the standard of living of the wage-earner, reduced the number of hours in the working day, secured legislation to limit child labor, and have corrected many other abuses and evils. These reforms without organized effort could never have been accomplished.

The entire economy of industrial labor has been uplifted, has received an impetus, has been endowed with a dignity, has had breathed into it a

spirit of hope and cheer as a result of the persistent and unwearying efforts of the intelligent workmen who stand at the head of their federations.

It remains for conscientious consumers to assist unorganized labor, labor too weak and unskilled to organize and help itself, by guiding it out of the slough of despond and despair where the indifferent, the careless buyers have been content to leave it.

MAUD NATHAN.

NARCOTIC INEBRIETY IN AMERICA.

NARCOTIC inebriety in America is on the wane. In this fact—of which I have convincing proof—is the cause for profound gratulation to every well-wisher of his kind.

Before the advent of sub-cutaneous medication this disease was comparatively unknown. Prior to the sixth decade of this century opium was mainly used among the lower classes, who, from tradition or craving for stimulants peculiar to some people, made use of the crude drug, or its tincture. But, with the coming of the hypodermatic syringe, and the widespread popularity of this mode of treatment, coupled with ignorance of its seductive power and pernicious consequences, it took on a steady growth that, for more than forty years, involved a host of victims, and brought more of sorrow to soul and body than the world will ever know.

Soon after the advent of this remedial device came our war, which gave beyond question an immense impetus to the growth of this disease. What with the vast amount of suffering from wounds and illness incident to that four years' conflict, and its remote sequence of broken health, and, above all, a general failure to realize the risk of untoward effect from increasingly prevalent hypodermic morphia medication, little wonder that, sparing neither sex, state nor condition, it numbered its victims by hundreds of thousands, and became a grave menace to private and public weal.

In 1869 a new form of this toxic neurosis was added—chloralism. Early reports of the non-inebriant effect of this hypnotic, which is without a peer for certain purposes, were found fallacious, for chemical records soon presented many cases of chronic poisoning due to its over use.

Sixteen years later came cocaine, which, though a blessing along certain remedial lines, in time brought a bane, the ravages of which on brain and brawn, especially the former—for its fascinating seductiveness is unique, its destructive energy appalling—gave it indisputable rank as the greatest wrecker of mind and body known.

These three—morphine, chloral, cocaine, mainly morphine—are the triple factors in the great wave of narcotic inebriety that has rolled over this land the last forty years.

The point of greatest import in this paper is the fact that the ebb of the toxic tide has begun. Various causes have tended to this glad end. Concerning cocaine, the most potent has been an appreciation by the profession of the mistaken statements of some writers as to its specific value in certain ills and its non-noxious power in all, and a realization of the risk attending its incautious use. That the unwarranted assertions made by prominent physicians as to the harmlessness of this drug had much to do with the rise and growth of cocaine inebriety in this country is beyond question. The full measure of that harm can never be known, and we may well felicitate ourselves that this dreadful disease is, increasingly, a thing of the past.